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ABSTRACT

Microteaching is a successful analytical tool because of its precision and simplicity, its low pressure approach, and the fact that it encourages experimentation. In addition, the technique is easily mediated, replicated, and controlled. (Author/JD)

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MICROTEACHING: A PERSONAL REVIEW

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Microteaching was born out of the frustration of liberal arts graduates who felt that there was nothing they could possibly learn from teacher education. To test their belief, we constructed a situation which would allow them to see if indeed this was true. Initially it was a ten minute session, later cut to five, where trainees taught content which was already known to the student but which they pretended to be learning. We selected a game, and the students role played four roles: "couldn't care less," a student who was disruptive; "slowpoke," a student who didn't catch on in spite of at least minimally adequate explanations by the teacher; "know-it-all," a person who would try to anticipate what the teacher was going to teach and be disruptive by the sheer weight of his knowledge; and finally "eager," a student who cooperated with everything the teacher did, good, bad, or indifferent. The result of this experience: we were successful in devastating these young trainees and showing them that they in fact had to learn a repertoire of teaching skills.

Gradually, however, the emphasis in microteaching shifted from such punitive efforts to more constructive teaching situations where the lessons became genuine and the students became genuine students without role playing. Also, the scope and influence of microteaching began to increase at this time as we saw its research potential to investigate technical skills in teaching. It presented an environment which was ideal for the research process in that it was simple, controllable and replicable. Indeed, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the development of microteaching in 1959, it may be useful to take an inventory of how microteaching has developed since then, look at what it has been able to accomplish and some of the areas where it has been less successful.

Since its initial development, what uses has microteaching been put to, systematically? First of all, it has been used at different levels, from pre-primary to higher education. It has been used both in pre-service and in-service education. It has been used to assist in the recruitment and selection of teachers, and to validate training results by getting pre and post training samples in performance. The one systematic inquiry of the use of microteaching as a selection device in the Freemont district of California indicated that microteaching by itself could assess candidates as effectively as the traditional recruitment mechanisms combined. In other words, a five minute teaching segment with no other information available to recruiters was considered as effective in selecting appropriate candidates as a combination of transcripts, interviews, letters of recommendation, personal statements, and other standard employment application information. It has been used for numerous research applications from the development of the technical skills of teaching, to research on the use of videotape, to research on the training of supervisors.

In the early years, much of the research that was done was on the efficacy of microteaching as a technique. More recently, however, the technique of microteaching has been pretty well accepted as having a de facto face validity. Its high level of acceptance both in the United States and abroad has been dues not so much to research evidence as it has been to thet satisfaction level of the teacher education staff, the teacher candidates, and school personnel involved in its use.

Microteaching has also been used to generate instances and non-instances of various teaching skills. It has been used for the development of modelling tapes for constructed specimen episodes for various purposes. Particularly

important is the fact that many technical skills of teaching have been validated because it was possible to produce microteaching constructed episodes of instances and non-instances which could then be reliably separated by raters who were instructed as to what the characteristics of the skill were. In some ways, one of the most important uses of microteaching has been as an excuse to legitimize the opportunity for teachers in training to involve themselves in actual teaching early in their training.

Microteaching has been an aid in the development of substantive teacher education in developing nations. It has always appealed to the precision and formalism of European teacher educators and indeed microteaching work has been carried on extensively in Germany in particular.

Interestingly enough, microteaching has been used both as a mechanism for acquiring formal, precise behavioral information and for more intuitive approaches to evaluation. Looking at a video microteaching segment, those educators who are most comfortable with subjective judgments find microteaching as useful as those teacher educators who use a more formal rating technique of evaluation.

Microteaching has been used as a vehicle of instructional development to test different formats of instruction and presentation. Alternative presentations of the same instructional material comprised one of its earlier uses in curriculum development. This involved members of a teaching department observing a variety of approaches to the same content and having this be the basis of the selection of an instructional methodology for the delivery of that content.

In some states, microteaching is a part of a recertification requirement.

In many instances, microteaching has led to the development of competence clusters. In competence clusters, a group of microteaching lessons are conducted to allow individual teaching skills to be tackled one by one by teacher education candidates. In fact, this has been one of the major applications of microteaching. It remains to be seen whether or not the now traditional technical skills of teaching associated with microteaching, such as set induction and questioning skills, can be joined with a variety of new skills yet to be identified. There is need for research to see if some new skills can be identified and constructed for teaching practice in microteaching settings. Microteaching has also been used as a self assessment device, where teachers can compare their performances with those of others and gain insights. The experience here is that it has been successful so long as teachers have some sort of guided protocol to assist them in the evaluation of the teaching specimens they see. Finally, microteaching has been used as a stimulus for mutual study groups, where groups of teachers, either pre-service or in-service, can band together using either peer teaching (where they take turns playing students) or with actual students to critique each other's performance and promote mutual instructional growth.

Again, microteaching has probably succeeded because teachers like it and supervisors like it. Teachers like it because it gives them an opportunity to practice in a safe setting. Supervisors like it because it has an aura of professional mystique. It sets them up to be experts. It is a rather harsh reality that this affective evidence is more important than any research findings. Further, some of the past research in the use of microteaching has been misleading. To conclude, for example, as has McDonald, that the technical

skills of teaching are trivial, has probably been misleading. Trends come and go. James Popham, who originally was one of the strongest champions of discrete and minute competencies, has now suggested the grouping of these competencies into something called mega-competencies, which suggests that some of the skills of microteaching might be approaches in a different way also. We have long known that the focus by students on the precise and rather simplistic technical skills of teaching has provided them with training opportunities which have been important far beyond the dimensions of the minute skills themselves. This is substantiated by numerous reports but is very difficult to document quantitatively. Hence, the need for a vigorous research program.

We also need new kinds of skills, such as helping teachers deal with students for whom they have low esteem, helping teachers learn how to more effectively time their remediation, and helping teachers spread their requests for student participation more evenly. We should also give teachers an opportunity to test their ingenuity in constructing lessons based on a variety of artifacts, and encourage them to develop skills in improvisation. In summary, microteaching in the decades ahead might very well provide the opportunity to develop a constellation of improvement strategies that are at the same time simple and take teachers to dramatically new ground in their teaching performance.

The issues surrounding the definition of the microteaching lesson, (such as the size of class), to be unresolved. Convention rather than research evidence dictates three to five students, but that seems to be a comfortable number which caters to simplicity and still allows for the simulation of a substantive instructional setting. The length of the microteaching lesson has also become standardized at somewhere between five and ten minutes without research

evidence, though as indicated earlier there is need for additional experimentation with longer lessons. Real students are preferable in most settings, so the wisdom of experience would suggest, but poor teaching has increasingly become the dominant form of the microteaching class. The complexity of the feedback, whether it is by audio, video, or simply live feedback presents another issue. If available, video feedback is highly desirable, but two cameras do not seem to add much more than one. Supervision continues to be an issue needing investigation, though for most technical skills supervisors of minimal training have been found to be satisfactory. Widely divergent opinions continue to be expressed on such issues as the frequency and numbers of microteaching sessions, how important the reteach lesson is, how often to repeat sessions on the same skill, whether certain sequences are desirable, how early, how late and how often the microteaching session should be scheduled, and finally the relationship between microteaching and other training. All these issues can serve as legitimate targets of research, though unfortunately a number of these issues have been solved by convention rather than by research evidence.

As microteaching approaches middle age, we need to make sure that we continue to vigorously pursue the alternatives so that we can allow this important device, which is now used by well over 50% of all teacher education programs in the United States, to achieve an ever increasing level of its potential. It should be stated that the places where microteaching has been less successful have been those dealing with complex teaching situations or those trying to gain some notion of student or teacher responsiveness over time. Ironically, it has had limited success in dealing with small group situations.

Though the number of students is small, typically three to five, it is much easier to simulate a large group setting than a small group interaction. Indeed, one of the most consistent criticisms of microteaching has been that it has, unintentionally, been used as a vehicle to encourage presentation and didactic teaching. Microteaching may be prejudiced toward "up front teaching" because of the length of the microteaching segment rather than its format. There is need for experimentation with longer microteaching sessions that would encourage small group and other more informal teaching approaches to be used.

Microteaching then, is a successful, analytical milieu, because of its precision, its simplicity, its low pressures, its low threats, the fact that it encourages experimentation, can be easily mediated, can be easily replicable, and is controllable. It is my personal hope that as microteaching continues to be used in training programs around the country, researchers will systematically use this very well controlled milieu for research purposes. I am convinced that the training applications of microteaching are in no way diminished by having research agendas overlaid. If there is one thing that seems to me to be important, it is to encourage educational researchers to take advantage of the widespread use of microteaching, which is most likely within reach of almost every educational researcher because of its widespread application in teacher education programs, and to use this milieu to continue to ask and hopefully to answer at least tentatively some of the perplexing questions in teacher education that remain sources of intrique and complexity.